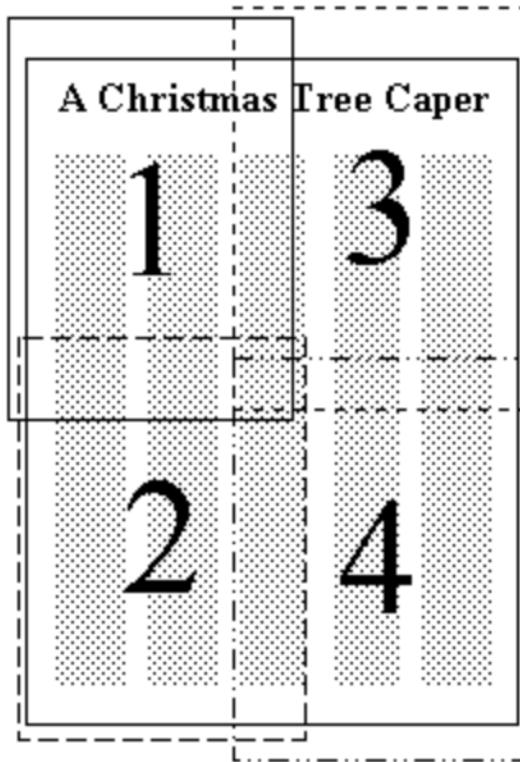


NOTE: This newspaper appearance was divided and enlarged to fill 8 ½" x 11" pages, roughly in the manner shown below.



Grounds for Marriage

SHORT STORY COMPLETE

By JACK RITCHIE

I SMILED apologetically. "I'm afraid that my boundary line runs through the middle of your house."

Trista Danfield's violet eyes narrowed. "Why are you so positive of that?"

"I just had my place surveyed," I said. "Because I won 300 feet of fencing on a quiz show. It's pre-cremmed welded wire mesh."

Her voice was acidly sweet. "And you intend to run the fence right through this house?"

"Well, no. I guess that wouldn't be too practical." I smiled again. "Did you know that Alexander Hamilton was born on the island of Nevis in the British West Indies?"

She blinked. "Should I?"

"That was the question that won me the fencing. I also got a double-stall calf creep feeder and 50 bags of chicken mash because I knew that Grover Cleveland's first name was Stephen." I looked about the pleasant sunlit room. "It was on TV and National Farm Week or something like that. I happened to be in the audience and the quiz master picked me at random."

She studied me for 10 seconds. "I guess you're about as random as anybody."

I nodded. "So there I was with 300 feet of fencing—and the steel posts—and I didn't know quite what to do with it. And then the thought struck me that it might be a good idea to use it on the boundary line between your property and mine. The only trouble was that I didn't know exactly where the boundary line was. When I bought this place in the Spring, Mr. Hanson just sort of waved a hand at the row of apple trees and said that's where the property ended."

"Those apple trees are definitely mine. My grandfather planted them himself."

I looked out of the window. "They need pruning."

"Just one moment," Trista said. She left the room and returned in two minutes with the deed to her property. "This describes the exact measurements



"That's Mr. and Mrs. Meredith. They're buying the

neck unhappily. "Well, I'll get to work."

I watched him go and then sat down on the porch swing. "Haven't been on one of these in years."

A green and white sedan slowed on the gravel road and turned up the driveway.

Trista glanced at me and looked a bit worried. "That's Mr. and Mrs. Meredith. They're buying this place."

I STOPPED swinging. "You're selling?"

She sighed. "Yes. My father's job took him to the West Coast and it looks permanent. So my parents gave me the house. But I have an apartment in the city and . . ." She regarded me evenly. "About this boundary . . . I wish you wouldn't say anything. At least not until Mr. Gavin is finished."

"I'll keep quiet," I said. "And swing back and forth."

misjudged you, Mr. Brannon."

"That's quite all right," I said. "Practically everybody does."

Meredith rubbed his hands. "Nice to have a good neighbor. When we get the place fixed up, drop over and we'll sharpen up our golf game. I'm tearing out that flower garden in the back and installing a putting green."

Trista blinked. "You're going to tear out the garden?"

He nodded. "You won't recognize the place when we're through with it. Frankly we bought it for the location. We'll spend more changing it to fit us than what we're paying to get it."

Mrs. Meredith agreed. "This porch has got to go. We'll rip it off."

"Rip it off?" Trista repeated unbelievingly. "But . . . but my mother and my father used to sit here on warm evenings . . . and the climbing roses . . ."

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"Those apple trees are definitely mine. My grandfather planted them himself."

I looked out of the window. "They need pruning."

"Just one moment," Trista said. She left the room and returned in two minutes with the deed to her property. "This describes the exact measurements of this land. And I know the deed is flawless. I happen to be a lawyer."

"Really? So am I." I glanced at her paper. "The trouble with these things is that they never mention any buildings. Just the dimensions of the land. Maybe Mr. Hanson didn't even know that he owned part of your house. Did you ever have a surveyor pace the land?"

"Well, no. But I've been climbing those apple trees all my life and I just took it for granted that . . ." She thought about it. "I'm going to have my place surveyed immediately."

"Of course. As a matter of fact, the surveyor I hired is still here. He's waiting outside."

HER EYES became suspicious. "I think I'll hire my own surveyor."

"His name is Gavin," I said. "Lives around here, so maybe you know him."

Her face cleared. "He's a distant relative."

We went out to the front porch, where Gavin waited.

Trista smiled. "Good morning, Henry. This man claims that he owns part of my house."

Gavin looked uncomfortable. "Well . . . according to the figures on his deed, he does, Trista." And then he became more cheerful. "On the other hand, maybe your two deeds overlap and there's some clerical error. But you ought to be able to win that one if you take it to court, Trista. You being a lawyer."

She indicated me. "So is he." Gavin rubbed the back of his

slowed on the gravel road and turned up the driveway.

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"I'll keep quiet," I said. "And swing back and forth."

Both Mr. and Mrs. Meredith were large and florid.

He advanced over the lawn with a proprietary air and removed the cigar from his mouth. "Well, Miss Danfield, my wife and I have talked things over and we've made up our minds to take this place at your price. Is it a deal?"

Trista glanced uneasily at me for a moment. "It's a deal."

Mrs. Meredith eyed the house with what seemed to me to be inherent disapproval. "We're going to make quite a few changes."

Gavin reappeared around the corner of the house. He dabbed at some perspiration on his face with a handkerchief. "I just did some preliminary pacing, Trista, and I'm afraid that Mr. Brannon really does own half of this house."

Meredith scowled and turned to me. "Is there some boundary dispute?"

"Not exactly a dispute," I said. "Just a fact."

His eyes went back to Trista. "Were you trying to sell me half a house?"

Trista flushed. "Of course not. I didn't think it was true until just this moment. Naturally the sale is off."

I held up a hand. "I don't think we all ought to get too excited. If you'll just point out what you've always thought the boundary line is, Trista . . . Miss Danfield . . . I'll be glad to sell the land back to you for a dollar. And I'll even give the dollar back to you after the deal."

TRISTA looked as though she might kiss me. "I think I've

drop over and we'll sharpen up our golf game. I'm tearing out that flower garden in the back and installing a putting green."

Trista blinked. "You're going to tear out the garden?"

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"We'll have those apple trees bulldozed out," Meredith said. "They make the place look too countryfied and we just want suburban."

Trista's eyes went from the climbing roses, to the row of apple trees, and, figuratively at least, to the garden in the back of the house. She took a deep breath and turned to the Merediths.

"I've changed my mind," she said firmly. "I won't sell." And I thought she implied, "To you, anyway."

Meredith frowned. "You just gave your verbal agreement to the sale and that's binding. You're a lawyer and you ought to know that. Mr. Brannon is a witness."

CLEARED my throat. "I think I'll put the chicken mash in the living room. To keep it out of the rain. And I'll start running up the fence tomorrow, first thing." I smiled amiably at Mrs. Meredith. "Whoever does the dishes in your house will have to ask my permission to rinse. I own half the sink."

Meredith glowered. "And you made a verbal agreement to sell, too. You can't back out of that."

I nodded. "Wouldn't think of it. But I made the verbal agreement to sell Trista. She hasn't signified that she would buy."

Trista looked at me gratefully. "I refuse to buy." She turned to the Merediths. "But of course you may still buy my half of the house."

Meredith sputtered, glared, and then spoke to his wife. "Beatrice, let's get out of here."

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We watched their car move down the driveway.

"Thank you," Trista said to me. "I really didn't know how to get out of that."

I swung back and forth a few times. "Of course I said I'd sell you that land for a dollar, but I didn't say when."

The violet eyes became wary.

"The purchase of land is an important thing," I said, "and one mustn't rush into it. I would suggest conferences and discussions for the next 30 days at least. In the evenings, if you prefer."

She had the faintest smile on her lips. "And if I refuse?"

I looked up at the sky. "I will begin moving the chicken mash into my half of the living room."

I did not have to move the chicken mash and after the third conference we no longer talked about the land.

I never did sell it to her. She

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I never did sell it to her. She
acquired it jointly, so to speak,
and her folks use the house
when they come from California
to visit us.

ALMANAC FOR TODAY



(By United Press International)

Today is Sunday, July 7, the
188th day of 1963 with 177 to
follow.

The moon is approaching the
last quarter.

The morning stars are Venus,
Jupiter and Saturn.

The evening star is Mars.

ON THIS DAY in history:

In 1846, the Mexican garrison
at Monterey surrendered to the
U.S. Navy.

In 1865, four persons named as
accomplices in the assassination
of President Lincoln were hanged.

In 1898, President McKinley au-
thorized the annexation of
Hawaii.

In 1960, riots swept the Congo
and natives murdered white per-
sons on sight.

A thought for the day—The
American novelist, Washington
Irving, said "A woman's whole
life is a history of the affections."

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